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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL
OPERATIONS
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE,
SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY,
RANKING MEMBER

December 19, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretaries Blinken and Austin:

I write with concern over ongoing negotiations between the United Kingdom and Mauritius over the return of control of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius. The Chagos are comprised of 58 islands, the largest of which is home to Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia, a critical installation hosting units from the U.S. Navy, Air Force, and Space Force, as well as the U.K Royal Navy.

Diego Garcia is located in the center of the Indian Ocean, making it a critical geographical asset. It serves as a support facility for military aircraft and ships transiting from the Philippines to the Middle East and gives the U.S. military's strategic bombers the capability to reach maritime chokepoints, sea lanes, and Chinese bases in the region. The naval support facility also can host nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers, as well as serve as a staging area for special operations forces.

Should the U.K. cede control of the Chagos to Mauritius, I have no doubt that China will take advantage of the resulting vacuum. To date, China has invested over \$1 billion in Mauritius and finalized a free trade agreement in January 2021. This year, the two countries celebrated the 50-year anniversary of diplomatic ties. In a recent Westminster Hall debate, British MP Daniel Kawczynski stated, "I would argue that the moment we give some of these outer islands to Mauritius, Mauritius will lease one or some of the islands to the Chinese almost instantaneously."

Although British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly stated that "The U.K. and Mauritius have reiterated that any agreement between our two countries will ensure the continued effective operations of the joint U.K. – U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, which plays a vital role in regional and global security," it is my understanding that current negotiations do not include safeguards to prevent China from building military facilities on other islands in the Chagos Archipelago.

The U.S. and U.K are ironclad partners in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, and Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia plays a central role in these efforts. As the Ranking Member on the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Readiness, I urge you to work with your U.K counterparts to ensure that our countries retain control of Diego Garcia, as well as make certain that China is prohibited from militarizing any of the other islands in the Chagos Archipelago.

We must ensure that we do not repeat the Biden Administration's shortsighted blunder of ignoring our generals' recommendations and abandoning Bagram Air Base during the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces in

Afghanistan. Bordering China and in the backyard of Russia and Iran, giving up Bagram took away a crucial American asset in the current great power competition. After losing this air base, officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense assured me that the loss of Bagram could be mitigated by strategic assets operating with similar effect from Diego Garcia. Conceding both of these critical assets would be catastrophic to deterring our adversaries in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Waltz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Waltz
Member of Congress